

TOWARDS A WINNING MSCA IF STEP-BY-STEP

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS OF MSCA IF

You are holding a practical guide that aims to help MSCA IF applicants understand the rules and conditions of the call correctly and to help them with writing all project proposal sections step-by-step, exactly in line with the evaluator's expectations. It should not substitute the official [Guide for MSCA IF applicants](#). Instead, it complements it with practical recommendations and useful tips gained through several years of consulting and revising MSCA IF projects. In addition, this handbook contains a translation of specific terms from "Brussels language" and provides an explanation of the project management jargon. These buzzwords usually surprise young researchers, who often do not understand them well but are expected to use them in their proposals. Therefore, I created a glossary at the end of this guide where you can find explanations of all the expressions labelled with a number index.

If, after reading this guide, you are still unsure about preparing your project proposal or would like to ask anything about MSCA IF, write to me. I will be happy to share my experience, answer your questions as soon as possible, review your project and provide a critical opinion and practical recommendations.

PRIOR TO WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL

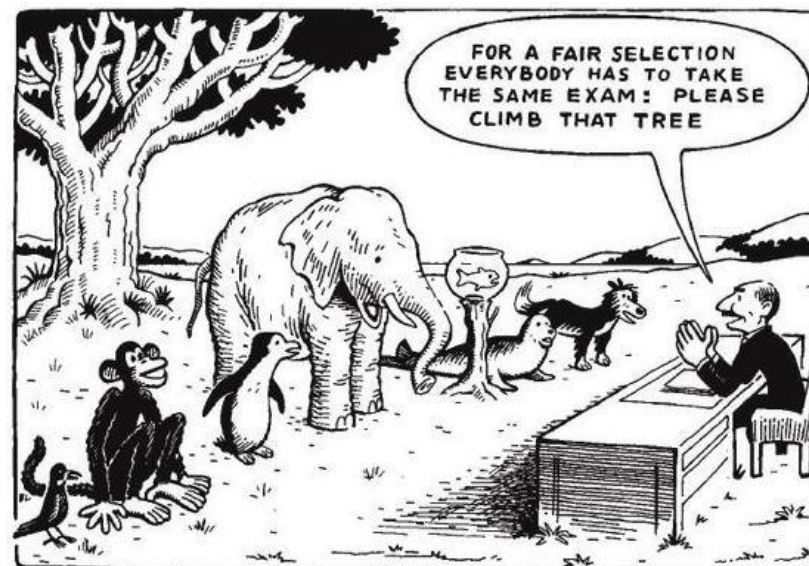
What distinguishes MSCA IF from other research grants?

- MSCA IF is not typical research project but rather a training through research. It is vital that apart from the research objectives you also address how the fellowship will help you to meet your professional ambitions. Do not focus solely on the scientific agenda! Be sure to also describe your Career Development Plan¹ goals (although the Career Development Plan¹ itself should not be included in the proposal). Elaborate on the description of your training activities and their impact⁶ on your career leading towards your future independence.
- When applying for MSCA fellowship, it is strongly recommended to alter your current research interest and focus on new research activities. The reason is that changing your research focus is more likely to expand your skills and knowledge. Do not propose a project that represents deeper and/or more detailed investigation or a continuation of your current topic. In this case, the amount of new gained skills and knowledge is limited and such projects have lower chances of being funded.
- Unlike many other grant schemes, it is not essential to have the preliminary data since you are expected to explore a new topic/field.
- It is NOT likely that the evaluators will have exactly the same scientific expertise (they might be postdocs just like you, or scientists from industrial/commercial sphere). Therefore, make sure your proposal is written in a clear, logical and accessible way.
- In the MSCA IF, pay special attention to the impact⁶ and outreach of your research. Impact⁶ represents the second most important evaluation criterion (after scientific excellence) but applicants often underestimate it. Think of your research's impact⁶ on you as a scientist, on your host institution and also importantly, do not forget the impact⁶ at the system level (e.g. to increase the quality and competitiveness of European research, increase international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility in Europe, better communication of R&I results to society).

What are my chances of success?

- The key factors influencing a candidate's success are: (1) scientific excellence, (2) the quality of the proposed training, (3) the impact⁶ of the training and the impact⁶ of the research results on the young researcher's future prospects and the host institution and, (4) your future supervisor's mentoring skills and experience. Bear in mind that the MSCA IF is a research-based training fellowship and not a research grant. It is crucial for your success to clearly understand the difference between the two and get familiar with the MSCA IF's evaluation criteria here. A good curriculum vitae and an interesting scientific agenda do not guarantee the success of your proposal. Candidates often underestimate the impact⁶ of the fellowship on their career development and the quality of two-way knowledge transfer between the researcher and the host.
- Also bear in mind that the current success rate for MSCA IF is 12.71% (178 620 applicants submitted proposals in 2019), which resembles the ERC's success rate, although this number differs a lot between EU members states. You can download detailed statistics for each individual EU member state here.
- Check the repository of funded projects on the [CORDIS](#)² website to get a better idea on what is expected and what kinds of proposals are funded. Unfortunately, CORDIS² does not allow a detailed search by keyword, topic, author

or research field, so you will have to go through all the projects' titles and abstracts.



Which topic/research problem should I choose to succeed?

- MSCA IF supports researchers from any research field or discipline. However, it is highly recommended to opt for different research problems/activities than your current or previous ones. The main reason is that the fellowship aims to diversify researcher's skills and to help them to acquire brand new knowledge.

Who will be the best supervisor for my fellowship?

- Your future supervisor must have an excellent CV, previous experience supervising postdocs and enough time to dedicate to you and your project. Your MSCA fellowship will be your joint project! Therefore, discuss your initial intent and the possible project idea with your future supervisor far in advance. Make sure he/she agrees with it, will help you with the grant proposal preparation and will support you throughout the duration of your fellowship. In fact, the input from your future supervisor will be inevitable in some sections of the proposal. Supervisors overwhelmed with too many duties outside of leading their research group (e.g. performing multiple functions elsewhere in academia or in industry) may contribute to a negative evaluation for your proposal. To avoid that (in case the choice of your supervisor is not that flexible), you can simply put less stress on describing the supervisor's outside duties in the proposal.
- Choose your future host institution well. The quality of available infrastructure and the training offered matters a lot in the proposal evaluation! Inform yourself on the previous MSCA IF calls' success rates in the given institution.

How long does the preparation of the proposal take?

- Reserve 2-4 months at a minimum for intensive preparation.
- You should start writing as far in advance as possible, not when the deadline is approaching or your superior forces you.
- Reserve enough time to get the necessary input from your supervisor/host institution, make sure you have time to use the feedback and comments. Your supervisor is a busy person and may not respond immediately to your requests.
- The call is open once a year (usually mid-September), so if you fail to finish your proposal in time, you will have to wait one year. Make sure you also allow yourself to enjoy summer while preparing the project proposal.
- Consult/discuss your proposal with trusted colleagues. Do not hesitate to ask for help! Recommendations and advice from more experienced colleagues can make major contributions to your success, so do not underestimate the time for revisions!
- Have enough time to draft, redraft and refine - every word matters!

How should I start?

- Once you agree on the project goal(s) and research hypothesis with your supervisor, stick to it and then you can start writing your grant.
- Download the proposal templates from the [Funding & Tender opportunities](#) portal³. You will have to log in and then set up a new project proposal submission.
- Focus first on part B, which you need to download the templates. Part A consists of general information, administrative data on the participating host institution, budget, ethics and few call specific questions. Part A is filled in online, directly in the [Funding & tender opportunities](#) portal³.
- Having the part B template, I advise starting by formulating your project aims and key training activities. These will form the basis of your project. Once you know WHAT you want to do within the fellowship, continue addressing the question WHY you want to do it (why it matters? - impact⁶) and HOW you will do it (implementation).

Where can I get more information?

- [MSCA IF website](#) presents detailed information about open and forthcoming calls and eligibility criteria. However, I highly recommend reading the [MSCA alumni](#) website. You will find very practical advice on how to write a competitive project proposal, contacts to MSCA alumni from each country, an interesting blog, newsletter, job adverts and other useful information that may be of interest there.
- Once you decide to write a proposal, get familiar with the [Guide for Applicants](#) of MSCA individual fellowships, to gain a proper understanding of this grant scheme's expectations. Also read the section of the [MSCA Work Programme for Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions](#) dedicated to the MSCA individual fellowship.
- Discuss your idea with other researchers who have already received a grant or have experience with supervising or evaluating individual MSCA fellowships.
- Contact me. I will try to clarify any possible questions and revise your MSCA draft.

GUIDELINES TO WRITE A WINNING PROPOSAL

How to compose the perfect abstract?

The abstract represents a summary that, at a glance, outlines the **KEY MESSAGE** and provides the reader with a clear understanding of the overall training aim, identifies the purpose, methods, results, and conclusions of your work. Your abstract should:

1. present your **MOTIVATION** - *WHY* does your topic matter? Why should we care?
2. clearly state the **RESEARCH/TRAINING OBJECTIVES** – *WHAT* problem do you address in your proposal?
3. briefly describe the **SCIENTIFIC APPROACH/methodology** – *HOW* will you solve the given research problem?
4. specify the **EXPECTED RESULTS**.
5. address the **IMPACT**⁶ of the fellowship on your career as well as the possible utility of the result. What change/implications will your project and its results bring?
6. comment on the originality and novelty of the project.
7. carefully pick the key terminology – highlight the key words representing your project.

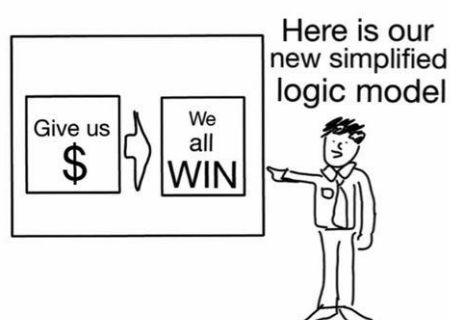
1. Excellence

1.1 Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects

1.1.1 Introduction

- Explain WHY the given topic/research problem is interesting, attractive, timely and important. Remember that you need to attract the evaluator's interest on the first two pages otherwise, you will not succeed.
- Briefly formulate the overall aim of your project. WHAT do you plan to do during your project and why? I recommend following the slightly modified KISS principle⁴ that says - Keep It Simple and Specific.
- I recommend providing a graphic summary or diagrams.

Create a "logic model"



1.1.2. State-of-the-art

- Set out a clear outline of the most important facts that are essential to understand your project goals. Do not overwhelm the evaluators with unnecessary details. The purpose of this section is not to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge. On the contrary, show that you can capture the most important information; grasp the problem with ease, perspective and in context.
- Highlight where the gap in current knowledge is that you aim to investigate.
- Make it brief. Avoid long, complicated sentences.
- Break the whole section into short paragraphs, each focussing on a separate part of the research project.
- Address how your project fits into the existing knowledge base.

1.1.3. Project objectives and overview of the action

- Create a clear, explicit structure: the overall goal >>> up to three main objectives / aims / goals >>> individual sub-objectives.
- Formulate consistent project aims throughout the proposal, mark them with numbers or letters and stick to this labelling format.
- Place and highlight the statement of the main project aims towards the beginning of the Excellence section (e.g. in frame or bold font). Do not strain the reader and do not leave formulating the project objectives until the later parts of the proposal.

- Create a SMART aim statement⁵ = your project aim must be specific, measurable, applicable, realistic, and timely

1.1.4. Research Methodology and approach

- It is recommended to follow the structure of your project objectives and link the methodology's explanation to each specific objective.
- Pinpoint only the most interesting, original and innovative methods. List the remaining methods avoiding details - it would unnecessarily take up the space needed for other chapters.
- Outline the order of the methods in which they will be used to achieve the project aims.

1.1.5. Originality and innovative aspects of the research

- Do you use any novel concepts? Do you investigate a hypothesis/topic that nobody has focussed on so far?
- Are you using any novel methodological approach that no one has ever used before? Do you develop innovative technology?
- How will your project expand a particular research area/field?

1.1.6. The interdisciplinary aspects of the project

- Research lying on an intersection of two or more disciplines is appreciated (e.g. technical engineer or a computer scientist joining a biomedical research lab), though not compulsory. The reason is that projects with an interdisciplinary perspective expand your knowledgebase and enrich you more with new experience.
- Interdisciplinarity is important not but forced. The project can may fit into a single discipline but the impact⁶ or output of the project could reach into other areas.

1.1.7. Gender dimension in the research context

- Integrating a gender dimension in your research is welcome, though not compulsory. Gender dimensions deal with sex and gender analysis in a research content, which is different from gender balance in research groups! Your project has a gender dimension only if gender is part of the research design and is systematically controlled for throughout the research process (in sociological or psychological studies, medical research on diseases affecting males and females differently etc.).
- Gender does not need to be main focus of your analysis.

1.2 Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two-way knowledge transfer between the researcher and the host

1.2.1. Knowledge/training transfer from the host to the researcher

- What training will you get and what new knowledge will you gain from the new supervisor, new colleagues, host institution and new country? How will it stimulate your research career in the future?
- Ask for input from your future supervisor or administrator at the host institution. Do they have any postdoctoral programs, seminar series, journal/discussion clubs, training of new users at host facilities and other educational activities to further develop your talent and enhance your skills?

1.2.2. Knowledge transfer from the researcher to the host

- How does the host institution benefit from your experience? What do you offer? Do you have any specific expertise that might be beneficial in the new group or institution?
- What specific measures will you use to embed your knowledge into the host organisation (mentoring students, delivering workshops, attending conferences, building collaborations with other European research organisations)

1.3 Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution

1.3.1. Qualifications and experience of the supervisor

- Input from your future supervisor is vital. Ask for your supervisor's CV.
- Describe your supervisor's main achievements in science, involvement in international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary collaborations, examples of awards, projects and publications, but most importantly, provide details on his/her mentoring skills and supervising experience! How many postdocs and PhD has he/she supervised? Any particularly successful alumni from the supervisor's group? Your supervisor should play a model role in the given research field.
- You can name your supervisory committee if you wish.
- Describe the involvement of your supervisor and/or the supervisory committee in your fellowship (e.g. monitoring progress of your work, assistance with your Career Development Plan¹).
- To avoid repetition, you can refer to *part B-2 Section 5 - Capacity of the Participating Organisations*.

1.3.2. Hosting arrangements

- Describe administrative, career development or other kinds of support and guidance you will be offered to aid your professional development.

- How will your integration in the new environment at the host's premises be organized?
- How will the facilities, infrastructure and research environment at the host institution/group stimulate your professional development? Do NOT simply list the offered infrastructure (that should be in section 3.3. *Appropriateness of the institutional environment/infrastructure*), instead discuss its impact⁶ on your future career and personal development. Examples: becoming a member of a specific community, participating in specialized training, gaining access to unique resources (archives, courses, infrastructure etc.).

1.4 Capacity/Potential of the researcher to reach or re-inforce a position of professional maturity/independence during the fellowship

- How will your current personal and professional experience and the proposed research contribute to your further development DURING the fellowship (mind the difference between this chapter and section 2.1 *Enhancing the potential and future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship*).
- Identify the most important benefits (skills, knowledge, experiences) of your current training and put them in the contexts of what is required for excellence in your field.

2. Impact

- Pay special attention to different dimensions of the project's impact⁶ – scientific impact, societal impact, impact on you/your career, on your host lab/institution. Think in broader dimensions - contribution to EU scientific excellence, innovation and competitiveness.
- Consider the immediate impact⁶ and long-term impact if relevant.
- Impact⁶ is the second most important evaluation criterion; its weight is 30%, while science counts for 50%. Despite that, its importance is often underestimated, one of the reasons being a misunderstanding of what is expected in this section.

2.1 Enhancing the potential and future career prospects of the researcher after the fellowship

- What is the impact⁶ of the proposed project on your future career AFTER the fellowship? Describe your career perspectives AFTER this fellowship. How will the fellowship in the host lab foster your career development towards independence? (be conscious of the difference between this chapter and section 1.4 *Capacity/Potential of the researcher to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity/independence during the fellowship*)

- Introduce your specific career goals/ambitions. You can mention more than just one intended career directions. How will the fellowship aid you to meet your Career Development Plan¹ goals?
- Show how the newly gained skills/experience improve your future employability and career prospects both inside and outside academia.

2.2 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the action results to different target groups

- What is the result of your project good for? Is this result needed?
- Do your new findings help close the knowledge gap described previously in the state-of-the-art section?
- How will you promote and raise awareness of your results and project outcomes (= DISSEMINATION)?
- In your Dissemination Strategy ⁷ identify the OUTCOMES of the project and target audience (different target groups) that will be informed and will benefit from them. The outcomes could be:
 - Knowledge (data, recommendations, policy, methodology, guidelines)
 - Product (software, GMO, material, algorithm, tool kit)
 - Service (analyses, advices – consulting, training)
- The target groups to which you will disseminate your results could be: peers in the research field, students, patients, parents, the elderly, industry, professional organizations, commercial players, policy makers etc.
- Do not forget to discuss open access⁸ and data management – be clear about the nature and openness of your data. For publications, open access⁸ mode is mandatory; you can also save your publications and data in available repositories. You can participate in Open Data Pilot and make specific data (except the sensitive data) publicly accessible.
- Do your results have a practical use for commercial or policy purposes (= EXPLOITATION⁹)?
- Discuss whether the result is commercially exploitable and patentable or not. Show that you are aware of exploitation⁹ possibilities. If you plan to generate exploitable results, address the following:
 - What is the commercial value?
 - To whom is the commercial value of interest?
 - What is the exploitation trajectory?
 - How can technology transfer office of the host institution assist you?
- Demonstrate how the host institution can assist in exploiting the results.
- For more information, consult the official [Guidelines for IP management in MSCA](#).

- Create a separate work package¹⁰ for Dissemination & Exploitation⁹
- Include dissemination activities in the Gantt chart¹¹ in the Implementation section (in 3.1 *Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources*)
- Summarize your Dissemination Strategy⁷ & Exploitation⁹ Plan in an easily readable table:

WHAT	TO WHOM	WHY	HOW	WHEN	KPIs ¹²	RESOURCES
Ongoing results and progress	Researchers from the department	Gaining critical feedback and helpful advices, exchange of experiences, stimulating collaborations	Departmental seminar	2x year	>30 PhD students and postdocs, >6 groupleaders	Own data recorded in lab book
...						

2.3. Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences

- COMMUNICATION = making your research activities known to society (the general public and the media) by promoting your project including its results, achievements, expectations, project activities, lessons learned etc.
- After summarising WHAT you want to raise awareness about, create a list of all groups you will target and WHO may benefit the most from achieved work. Think of your audience sufficiently broadly. The target groups could be:
 - end-users of the project activities (patients, industry, specific clients)
 - interested groups (researchers, other experts, students, parents, racial minorities...)
 - decision-makers at local, regional, national and European level
 - press and media
 - general public (public engagement is welcome since it helps to gain direct feedback on public's concerns, interests and priorities for science and technologies)
- Indicate HOW you will communicate the project or its outcome to each target group. Your outreach activities could be:
 - publishing - scientific publication and other written material such as reports, articles in newsletters, press releases, leaflets or brochures

- participation in public events e.g. international conferences and other meetings
 - using social media and blogging
 - taking advantage of audiovisual media and products such as radio, TV, YouTube, Flickr, video clips, podcasts or apps
 - mentoring
 - MSCA/academic activity promotion (becoming MSCA Ambassador, participating in Researcher's Night, Science Slams, Institutional Open Day)
 - project branding and logo
 - engaging existing contacts and networks (perhaps you are member of an organization focused on certain research topic or member of student organisation)
- Do not forget to assess the impact of each communication measure (e.g. number of published articles, number of website views, number of trained students etc.). Use the key performance indicators (KPIs) ¹² to evaluate your communication strategy.
 - Link communication activities to EU policy when possible e.g. EU Science education.
 - Summarize your Communication strategy in an easily readable table:

WHAT to communicate	TO WHOM	WHY	HOW	WHEN	KPIs
Analyses of questionnaire results	Parents of school kids	Raising awareness about bullying, increasing prevention	Leaflets spread at schools, discussion lecture for schoolkids and their parents	Month 18-24	>150 parents and >300 school kids informed
...					

3. Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation

3.1 Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

- Break-down your work plan into individual tasks or activities. Make the structure clear, logical and feasible.
- It is common to structure your work plan into WORK PACKAGES (WP) ¹⁰ – sets of related tasks that generate a separate project outcome. Each WP is characterized

by effort and time and may cover a single task or several related tasks. Propose the WPs so that they correspond to individual project sub-objectives. In addition, create a separate WP for Dissemination & Exploitation⁹. The table below demonstrates the typical description of a WP:

WP1	Start month[M]: 1	Duration: 12
Title:	Identification of the biological role of XZ molecule in cell cycle regulation	
Deliverables:	D1.1: Optimised protocols for cell synchronization [M3]. D1.2: Presentation of new results in departmental seminar [M12]. D1.3 poster presentation at FEBS conference on Cell Cycle [M10].	
Milestones:	MS1: BY2 cell synchronization optimized [M3]. MS2: Identification of mechanism of XZ-mediated cell cycle regulation successfully achieved [M12].	

- For a two-year fellowship, do not propose more than 6 WPs. Create a feasible plan.
- Propose a credible set of DELIVERABLES¹³, ideally at least one deliverable for each project aim. A deliverable¹³ is a tangible result of the action.
 - Examples of deliverables¹³: article, database, website, Career Development Plan¹, report, conference presentation, poster, patent, prototype etc.).
 - Use standard deliverable¹³ labelling: D1.1 (= first deliverable in aim 1), D1.2 (= second deliverable in aim 1), D2.1 (= first deliverable in aim 2), D2.2 (= second deliverable in aim 2) etc.
- Create a comprehensive list of MILESTONES¹⁴ (=point in time that helps to measure/control progress, could be understood as an intermediate goal).
 - Examples of milestones¹⁴: dataset/sample collection accomplished, method optimised, technology adopted as a basis for the next step of the project etc.
 - Use standard milestone¹⁴ labelling: MS1 (= first milestone), MS2 (= second milestone) etc.
- Do not forget financial management – describe how you plan to spend the Research, training and networking costs, list the most costly items in the budget that are essential for your work.
- Plan and plot the work in time – draw a GANTT CHART¹¹ and identify the subpart's interdependencies. The MSCA IF template B contains an example of a Gantt chart¹¹ but you can choose from countless other formats e.g.:

	year 1												year 2											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
WP#1	Set up of XY protocol																							
D		1.1				1.2																		
M		1		2		3																		
WP#2							Application of XY protocol on mutants																	
D										2.1								2.2						
M															4	5	6							
WP#3													Quantitative analysis of mutants											
D																		3.1				3.2	3.3	3.4
M																		7		8				

MONTHS	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30	33	36
WP1.						D1.1						
Task 1.1			M1									
Task 1.2				M2		M3						
WP2							D2.1					
Task 2.1						M4						
WP3							D3.1	D3.2				
Task 3.1								M5				
WP4										D4.1	M6	D4.2
Task 4.1										M7		
Task 4.2											M8	
Task 4.3												M9

3.2 Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management

- Assess all important challenges that might endanger you achieving your project aims. Distinguish between operational risks¹⁵ and experimental risks¹⁶. Do not give evaluators a chance to identify any risks that you forgot to mention!
- Outline an honest and convincing contingency plan. You can organize the overview of risks in a table e.g.:

Potential problem	Risk (low-high)	Probability (low-high)	Related WP	Contingency plan
...				

- Convincingly describe how administrative issues will be managed at the host institution – input from your future supervisor is needed! Will you get any admin support and help from experienced project managers? Does the host institution have practical to manage the project financially and administratively, monitor its progress and quality in place?
- Describe regular meetings with the supervisor/supervisory committee and the hosting research group that will provide feedback on the work and career progress, and quality control.

3.3. Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)

- Describe the infrastructure and capabilities of the host institution needed to accomplish your project aims – input from your future supervisor is needed!
- Does the host institution offer you a fully equipped workstation, access to libraries and laboratories, a training program or academic courses (which significantly increases the credibility of the project)?
- Briefly describe the internal organization and mechanisms of work progress monitoring adopted at the host institution.
- Mention briefly, if the host institution has endorsed the [Charter & Code](#) principles, and if they have been awarded the [HR Excellence in Research Logo](#).

Part B-2 Section 4 - CV of the experienced researcher

- Follow the template and use all the available pages to describe all your achievements so far.
- This is one of the first parts of the proposal that evaluators read. They seek coherence with section *1.4 Capacity/Potential of the researcher to reach or re-inforce a position of professional maturity/independence during the fellowship*.
- The information mentioned in your CV could include:
 - Publications, relevant bibliometric indicators
 - Research monographs and any translations thereof
 - Expeditions attended
 - Granted patent(s)
 - Invited presentations
 - Prizes/Awards/Academy memberships
 - Supervising and mentoring experiences
 - Funding achieved so far

Part B-2 Section 5 - Capacity of the Participating Organisations

- Follow the template and ask for input from the host institution (your supervisor or grant officer).

Part B-2 Section 6 - Ethical Issues

- Respond honestly to all questions and consult with your supervisor.
- You do not need any official ethical approvals before submission. You will be asked to provide necessary approvals during negotiation in case your proposal succeeds and gets funding.
- For details consult the H200 Guide “[How to complete your Ethics Self-Assessment](#)”

WHEN YOU FINISH WRITING THE PROPOSAL

Just before submission

- Do not consider the proposal finished once you have written it. Read it repeatedly and revise the text as much as you can.
- Bear in mind the EVALUATION CRITERIA described in detail in the [Guide for applicants](#). Make sure your proposal meets all of them!
- The day before submission upload each „completed” version of your proposal in case the final upload at the last minute fails.
- Make sure you have uploaded the Support Letter from the host institution uploaded.

After proposal submission

- The Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) will be accessible from the [Funding & Tender opportunities](#) portal³ after approximately 5 months. You will be informed by email.

GLOSSARY

¹**Career Development Plan (CDP)** – is a tool for proactive planning and implementing steps towards the researcher’s career goals. CDP should be established and regularly reviewed together with the supervisor. It makes sense when it starts early in the researcher’s career and becomes a continual activity. CDP is a purely voluntary activity and is not a part of the MSCA IF proposal. However, it brings a lot of benefits e.g. it helps researchers to set career goals, maximize their potential, seek and make the most use of development opportunities and many other benefits. More details including CDP examples can be found [HERE](#).

²**Cordis website** - serves as a public repository with all project-related information held by the European Commission such as project factsheets, participants, reports, deliverables¹³ and links to open-access publications etc.

³**Funding & Tender opportunities portal** – serves as the entry point for participants and experts in funding programmes and tenders managed by the European Commission and other EU bodies. You will need to register here to submit your MSCA IF project. You use the same login to manage the project while implementing it, submitting reports, or searching for other EU funding opportunities.

⁴**KISS principle** – the KISS is originally acronym for “keep it simple, stupid”. The idea is that a complicated project is difficult

to manage and a complicated proposal is complicated to develop, use, document and support. Specify your project goals as simply and specifically as possible. It is not only elegant but also gives you better control over to implement your goals.

⁵SMART aim statement - describes what a successful project is expected to achieve. “SMART” is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Applicable, Realistic, and Timely. A SMART aim needs to be precisely formulated, its achievement should be verifiable or measurable, it involves a work or an action and should be achievable within a given timeframe.

⁶Impact – is the effect that your project has on individuals (you, your supervisor), host institution and society (scientific community, students, patients, EU and any other results users). The effects could be positive (preferred) or negative, intentional (preferred) or accidental, short or long-term.

⁷Dissemination Strategy - describes how to distribute information about the project, its progress and results. Dissemination should be an ongoing dialogue with the target audience during your project. A detailed Dissemination Strategy describes what issue you will raise awareness of, to which target audience, the purpose (why?), timing (when?) and methods for dissemination.

⁸Open Access – is a principle through which research outputs are distributed online for free and without any other access barriers. In research, the unlimited online access to scientific information is usually provided either by publishing in open

journals that do not charge readers or by archiving in publically available databases and open repositories (usually universities have their own repositories). Open access is compulsory for all research projects in HORIZON 2020.

⁹Exploitation - is the use of results for commercial purposes or in public policymaking and benefiting from it. Exploitation relates to the development or commercialisation of a product or a service and thus differs from dissemination. However, there might be some overlap between dissemination, exploitation and communication, especially for close-to-market projects. Keep in mind, though, that the Horizon 2020 programme focuses more and more on impact in society. Therefore, ways to exploit results should always be on your mind when writing a successful proposal or planning your research.

¹⁰Work package (WP) – is a group of related tasks within a project with defined time duration. WPs are useful tools that break an entire research proposal into defined sections (WPs), help to create a logical structure in the work and allocate resources (time, finances and human effort) more effectively. Often WPs correspond to individual project aims. An additional WP dedicated to dissemination and exploitation is usually included in the workplan. At a minimum, each WP includes a title, information about when it starts and ends, the objective and whether it leads to specific deliverables¹³ and has any milestones¹⁴.

¹¹**Gantt chart** – shows a list of WPs (or project aims) displayed against time and demonstrates the dependency relationship between individual WPs. Thus it nicely visualizes what has to be done (the activities) and when (the schedule). A Gantt chart can also include information about deliverables¹³ and milestones¹⁴. There is an endless number of various Gantt chart formats available on the internet.

¹²**Key performance indicators** (KPIs) for evaluating impact of your communication strategy – are quantifiable metrics used to measure if you meet the objectives of your communication strategy (e.g. number of published articles, number of website views, and number of trained students). They are strategic indicators demonstrating if you communicated your project effectively and thus if you achieved expected impact.

¹³**Deliverables** – is a measurable and verifiable (often also tangible) outcome that completes a work package¹⁰/task e.g. publication, product, patent, data collection, tool.

¹⁴**Milestones** – describes the status of the project, represented by a moment at which one or more project activities are complete – marks a critical decision point / turning points e.g. data collection complete, model built, samples collected.

¹⁵**Operational risks** – are risks caused by circumstances unrelated to scientific work but still can endanger your project. It could be: lack of suitable facilities to conduct planned research, incapability of MSCA fellow to integrate into a new group/host institution, long-term MSCA fellow or supervisor illness, data lost, the

fellowship funds do not cover all the real costs of the necessary experimental material.

¹⁶**Experimental risks** – are risks directly related to your research e.g. inability to sufficiently optimize the method, expected research results are not achieved, experimental plants are infected by pests, loss of key research data source